

Local Government Survey Report

June 24, 1999

SUMMARY

Communications

Local government responded with the following **satisfaction** level for timeliness in answering phone calls, email messages, letters and requests for materials:

Phone calls:	89%
Email messages:	96%
Letters:	82%
Requests for material:	91%

Service Delivery

How services are delivered:

- Local government responded in **agreement** (strongly agreed or agreed) with the following statements, Ecology staff:

Communicate clearly:	88%
Are knowledgeable:	93%
Are courteous:	98%
Listen:	92%

Ease and clarity of materials:

- Local government responded in **agreement** with the following statements, Ecology staff write:

Easy-to-use materials:	71%
Clear regulations:	57%

Assistance

- Local government responded in **agreement** with the following statements, Ecology staff:

Provide information about Ecology services and products:	71%
Provide technical assistance when needed:	88%

Partnering

- In partnering, local government responded in agreement with the following statements, Ecology staff:

Understand what drives local government decisions:	62%
Develop environmental priorities together:	62%
Consider local government's information in decisions:	77%
Work together toward creative solutions:	76%
Partner effectively with local government:	76%

Permit Assistance Center

Three questions were asked about the knowledge and use of the Permit Assistance Center located in Ecology's Headquarters Building in Lacey. Local government responded affirmatively to the following:

Knowledge of the Permit Assistance Center:	45%
Requested information from the Permit Assist. Center:	20%
The information was helpful:	84%

Financial Assistance

Three questions were asked about the knowledge and receipt of Ecology grants and loans. Local government responded affirmatively to the following:

Knowledge about Ecology grants and loans:	76%
Receipt of an Ecology grant or loan:	55%
Satisfaction with:	
Grant or loan agreement:	92%
Technical assistance on the project:	88%
Financial reimbursement:	88%

SURVEY PURPOSE

In April 1998, Ecology made the decision to undertake a customer feedback survey of local government designed to measure:

- Satisfaction with delivery of services (responsiveness, professionalism and courtesy).
- Effectiveness in partnering for improved environmental protection.

Ecology's decision to survey local government was based upon the current coordinated efforts underway to implement local watershed planning and our partnership with local government for environmental protection. The protection of Washington's environment at the local level is fundamental in meeting our mission to protect, preserve and enhance Washington's environment and promote the wise management of our air, land and water for current and future generations.

How Ecology works with local government often determines how successful we are in protecting Washington's environmental and the public health of its citizens.

SCOPE

This survey was designed for assessing local government's opinion of Ecology's services. Local governments included in the survey were: cities, counties, ports, fire districts, conservation districts and local air authorities. Within counties; health districts, county commissions and public works departments were included. Within cities, wastewater treatment plants were included in addition to the environmental programs.

The survey was conducted by the agency's Steering Committee on Results (SCORE). SCORE formed a sub-committee to design, develop, test, conduct and analyze the survey results. The following timing occurred:

Design	Develop	Test/Redesign	Conduct	Analyze
5/98 - 7/98 →	8/98 - 11/98 →	11/98 - 12/98 →	1/99 - 2/99 →	3/99 - 6/99

The sponsor of the survey was Ecology's Senior Management Team.

SURVEY DESIGN

Type of Survey

A mail survey was used. Survey recipients were requested to make additional copies of the survey to complete for each Ecology program they work with. The survey was designed to be short. It was estimated to take approximately 15 minutes of the respondents time to complete (per survey).

Survey Objectives

Four objectives were developed to determine Ecology's effectiveness in working with local government:

- Contact: How often are Ecology programs contacted per year by local government.
- Responsiveness: How quickly Ecology programs respond.
- Service: How effectively Ecology responds.
- Permit and Financial Assistance: Awareness of programs and level of service.

Open-ended questions were included in the survey. A copy of the survey and the cover letter from Ecology's Director are included in Appendix A.

PRE-TEST

The survey was pre-tested by 20 local government staff from Thurston County and the City of Olympia. They were asked to participate in one meeting to complete the survey as a group. Through a facilitated process, they provided feedback on the survey design, questions and intent.

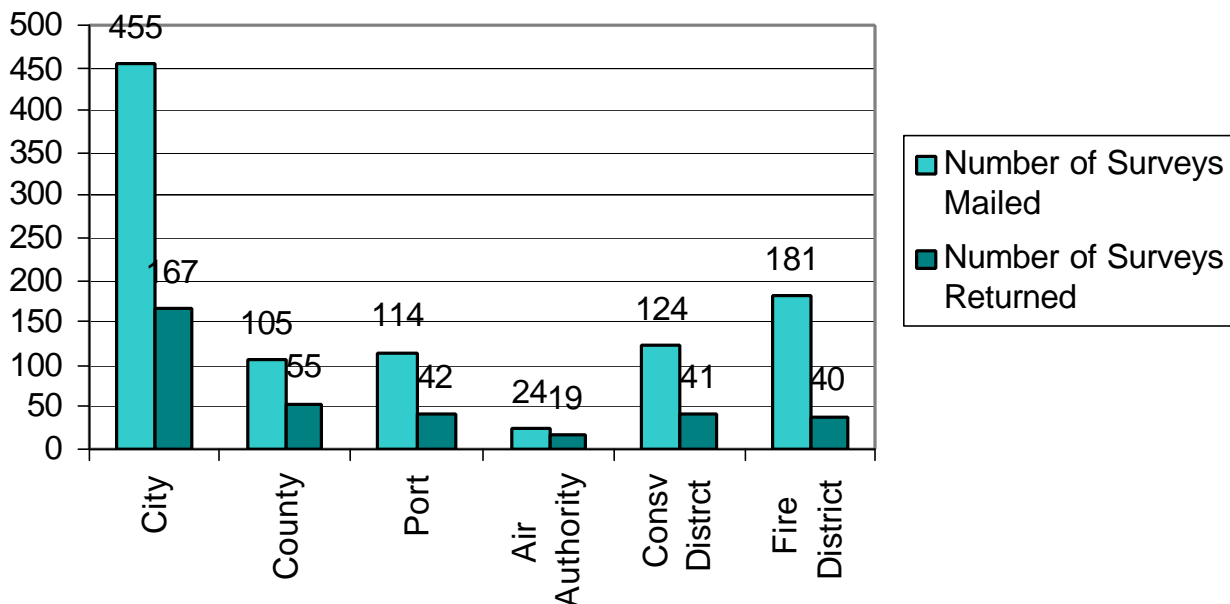
This proved to be invaluable to the development of the survey. Based upon their feedback, the survey was redesigned and then mailed back to the same group for additional feedback. Their response was positive and gave Ecology the confidence that the survey was ready to implement.

SAMPLE GROUP

The sample group for the survey was randomly selected from a combination of Ecology's mailing lists, the directory of city and county officials, fire districts, conservation districts and ports. The full list of potential survey recipients was 2,500. Ecology determined that one third of this total, 858, would give us a credible sample size. From the list of 2,500 every third name was selected. The list was arranged by zip code to truly represent a random sample.

Thirteen surveys were returned due to incorrect addresses or recipients, which brought the total number of surveys received by representatives of local government to 845. Survey recipients were requested to make additional copies of the survey, as necessary. This request resulted in 158 additional surveys, bringing the adjusted total of surveys mailed and copied to 1,003.

The following graph shows the number of surveys mailed and copied compared to the number returned by each local government entity.



RESPONSE RATE

The overall response rate for the survey was 36%.

The percent response rate by each governmental entity was:

Cities	37%
Counties	52%
Port Districts	37%
Local Air Authorities	79%
Conservation Commissions	33%
Fire Districts	22%

ANALYTICAL METHODOLOGY

Each survey was numbered to correspond to a survey recipient. The numbering allowed for an efficient reminder system to those recipients who had not returned the survey. It also allowed for keeping track of how many surveys were copied.

The survey responses were entered into *Raosoftware* SURVEYWin. SURVEYWin is a statistical database that facilitates the gathering and analysis of information. Within the context of

the Local Government Survey data was received via U.S. mail and input manually. The data was then compiled electronically and analyzed according to user specifications.

Once entered into SURVEYWin, the data was matched with a GIS interface to collect additional information on county, watershed inventory resource area, legislative district and congressional district.

The quality and ease of use of graphs and reports in SURVEYWin did not meet our needs or expectations. MicroSoft Excel was used to generate the graphs. Queries of the data are made in SURVEYWin to extract the desired geographic information. The raw data is then entered into Microsoft *Excel* to produce the desired graphic displays of information.

The data can be sorted by county, program, watershed, legislative district and congressional district. In addition, the data can be viewed by Ecology Regional Offices and Field Offices.

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Four open-ended questions were included in the survey. A summary of the responses to those questions follows:

Question 20. What is the best service local government has received from Ecology?

Survey respondents were requested to answer this question based upon their knowledge and working relationship with Ecology's environmental program(s) they work most closely with. The responses to this question were analyzed and then grouped into "themes" to give an overall summary of the best service Ecology's environmental programs provide.

The themes are presented in order of the greatest response to lowest. The number after the statement represents the number of times survey responses were like or similar to the statement.

1. Ecology staff are helpful on complex permits, technical and financial (grant) assistance. (73)
2. Ecology staff are courteous and supportive. (57)
3. Ecology staff are responsive to phone calls, questions and requests for help. (45)
4. Ecology staff conduct well-run hearings, workshops and training. (13)
5. Ecology staff provide useful information through fact sheets, data and their website. (13)
6. Ecology staff coordinate and partner well with local government. (11)
7. Ecology staff provide useful technical and guidance documents. (7)

Question 21. What specific changes would local government recommend Ecology make?

Survey respondents were requested to answer this question based upon their knowledge and working relationship with Ecology's environmental program(s) they work most closely with. The responses to this question were analyzed and then grouped into "themes" to give an overall summary of the specific changes local government recommended to Ecology.

The themes are presented in order of the greatest response to lowest. The number after the statement represents the number of times survey responses were like or similar to the statement

1. Improve coordination, partnerships and educational opportunities between local government and Ecology. (36)
2. Increase Ecology budgets and staffing levels, especially to retain experienced staff. (29)
3. Improve responsiveness to local government needs. (14)
4. Provide quicker response time for permits and rule development. (11)
5. Ecology needs to be more aggressive in pollution reduction. (10)
6. New science is good, but not at the expense of proven technologies and practices. (9)
7. Increase training opportunities and workshops for local government. (7)
8. Improve communications with local government. (7)
9. Improve consistency in how Ecology implements policy and technical guidance between regions. (7)
10. Simplify regulations. (5)
11. Increase grant dollars to local government. (4)
12. Improve public information and education. (3)

Question 28. The survey recipient was asked to state the top three environmental priorities facing their environmental organization.

The priority information is very difficult to summarize at the agency level. Therefore, this data is being supplied directly to the program managers in addition to program reports.

Question 29. General comments.

Survey respondents were requested to tell Ecology anything else they wanted us to know. The responses to this question were analyzed and then grouped into “themes” to give an overall summary of the general comments.

The themes are presented in order of the greatest response to lowest. The number after the statement represents the number of times survey responses were like or similar to the statement

1. Praise (23)
2. Program specific information – general information (22)
3. More funding for resources – “unfunded mandates” (15)
4. Want better communication with local government and coordination with visits to local government (12)
5. Want more environmental or program education (10)
6. Ecology misses a lot of deadlines (i.e. staff pulled from one action to salmon priorities) (7)
7. Too many Ecology organization changes – don’t know chain of command (5)
8. Local government has mixed experiences with Ecology staff – no consistency/message (5)
9. Ecology’s decisions need to consider the impact on landowners/citizens (5)
10. General criticism (5)
11. Ecology staff act as their own agent – they need more accountability (4)
12. General – non specific comments (4)
13. Need to focus on cooperative problem solving (3)
14. Local government should have more regulatory flexibility (2)
15. Ecology is spending money on the wrong priorities (2)
16. Want more service from Ecology (1)
17. Human first: not fish (1)
18. Ecology going beyond EPA regulations costs money and time (1)
19. Ecology lacks an understanding of local government operations (1)
20. Ecology lacks adequate staffing levels in regional offices to provide services (1)
21. Access to Ecology HQ building and visitor parking is difficult (1)
22. Lack of Ecology goals and priorities impacts local government planning (1)